

HISTORY
OF THE
PRENTIS CLUB

Written By

Berthe S. Van Voorhees

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In 1932, the members of the program committee suggested that this group might be interested in having a history of the Prentis Club read on this happy occasion. Now, do not be alarmed by the size of this volume. Most of the pages are blank. In fact, too many of them are blank for this to be worth of the name "history".

Can you imagine what a task it would be to write the history of a 37-year old club who were not historically minded enough to preserve any of their records, not even the secretary books? A few years ago, when women's clubs began to grow history conscious, Katharine Luening was appointed by our president to collect items of interest in the club, and all members were asked to assist her in every way possible. This collection of the miscellaneous items for the nucleus of this record.

With the passing of Katharine, I was given the task of continuing the work and getting it into book form. This book is lovingly dedicated to Katharine in the memory of her loving service to the club she loved so well.

The first three years we had no year books, and Vida Price Franklin, aunt of the Hoge girls, furnished us with outlines of our lessons. We did not have

even a list of our charter members when this book was started. During the two years of World War I we did not have program meetings, but spent our time sewing and knitting for the Red Cross, hence we had no year books for those years.

All the records we had of these five years were newspaper clippings saved by individual members. Being of an optimistic turn of mind, I thought Ida. or Myrtle or Ethel could fill in the gaps of my own memory, but optimism suffered a severe jolt. One of the early members would tell me that a certain girl was a charter member. Another one, equally as truthful and intelligent, would say, "Oh no, she joined several years later" and still another would say, "I don't recall that she was ever a member", and so it went!!

Just among ourselves -- I would not admit it to an outsider -- it had me worried. "Can it be possible" I thought, "that we Prentis girls have reached the age when our memories are failing?" Perish the thought! and then I remembered a remark made by an old lady in a novel by Bess Streeter Aldrich, and I hastened to the library and checked out a copy of "The Clutters". I will not take the time to tell the entire story, but will briefly relate the circumstances that I had in mind.

Grandmother Clutter and her six married sons were planning a reunion. There were to spend one happy day together. For weeks Grandmother had looked forward to the event and she prayed that nothing would happen to prevent it being a happy occasion. The day arrived, and as they sat around the

table together, the aged mother looked over her group of splendid, successful men and her heart swelled with pride. They discussed their boyhood days, arguing as they had always done. They talked of the current topics of the day and each told something of interest in his work. Then they launched upon the topic so dear to the hearts of all adults of all generations -- the shortcomings and follies of the young generation. Everything was worse than it was in their day.

And now the day of which Grandma had dreamed for so long had come and gone, and she sat in her chair by the fireside reviewing the events and conversation of the past few hours. She tried to visualize each one as he had sat before her; but everything was a blur. Instead of his face, there appeared the face of a rosy-cheeked boy. Those boyish faces were much more clear than were the faces of the stalwart men who had just left her. Vainly she tried to call them back to her, but all she could see were six little boys playing about her knees. At last, she sank back into her chair and with a smile of resignation said, "Now, I am old. I am an old woman, for the memories have become real and the realities have turned to dreams." Well! That story made me feel better. Our memories are certainly not real. We are still living in the future. Old age must be a long way off.

If, as I read, you will mentally insert such phrases as "it is alleged" "I am quite positive" or "it must be true" you will save me much repetition and perhaps, avoid legal entanglements. This record may be incomplete; but I assure you that it is "hysterically" correct. Any corrections or additions will be

gladly received, but beware of your memories being too real or you may find yourself pigeon-holed with Grandma Clutter.

To Ida Hoge and Ethel Showalter is due the credit of organizing the Prentis Study Club. Although they were young girls, they realized that a woman's cultural education should not end with graduation from school. So they talked it over with a number of other girls who thought they would be interested in a study club, and then called a meeting at the home of Ida and Blanche Hoge. At that time, the Cary Circle was the only women's club in the city.

Other meetings were held in the Showalter home and twenty girls promised to join, but when it came to the organization meeting, two of them failed to appear. They were not very enthusiastic over the idea of becoming cultured, so there were 18 members at the first regular meeting at Maude Barrett's. Ethel Showalter was elected President; Edna Robbins, Vice President; Ida Hoge, Secretary and May Myers, Treasurer. Other members were Myrtle Nelson, Mabel Klein, Blanche Hoge, Kate and Lottie Wheeler, Gertrude Caldwell, Maude Barrett, Bessie Walker, Bessie Hemphill, Florence Wilson, Effie Smiley, Laura Bixby, and Berthe Showalter.

The club was named for Mrs. Caroline Prentis whom we considered the typical Kansas Club Woman. The first year we quoted Rossetti, Keats, Browning, Scott and Tennyson. In fact, we must have learned almost everything about Rossetti at the first program meeting on November 7, 1898.

The program follows:

Music: Bessie Walter

Paper: Life of Rossetti

Paper: Rossetti, his friends

Paper: Rossetti, a painter

“Selections from Rossetti’s poems”

Maude Barrett read a letter from Mrs. Prentis, also her autobiography, which she said was the only one she had ever written. Refreshments were followed by adjournment. In reflecting upon this program after a lapse of years, I wonder why our meetings did not turn into slumber parties.

However, we did have our frivolous moments as some of us recall. And we had our parties every four to six weeks, but they were not allowed to interfere with our regular meetings. Now our guest nights ~~were~~^{are} in our year books, printed in bold print, and they take the place of our regular meeting. We always invited enough mem to “go around” even though they did not date some of our members. We would ask eligible newcomers to town or men who were not going steady with some non-member. The evening after each formal party we held a “scrap party” to which we invited only the special friends of our girls. We served scraps from the night before and everything was informal and we had more fun at the scrap party than at the first.

The fall of 1899, Mrs. Prentis paid us a visit and we held a reception for

her in the Barrett home. We all fell in love with this gracious, silver haired woman whose life had been so rich and fruitful. She gave us some motherly advice and the burden of her message was that, if we wished to grow and thrive, we must have a goal. We must devote part of our means and our time to the betterment of our community. She suggested welfare work, such as taking magazines to the County Poor Farm; Christmas baskets to the poor and upon learning that our city had no public library, she suggested that we assume that project as our special responsibility. We tried to follow all of her suggestions but the last one made the deepest impression on us. We had no assets except our youth and enthusiasm. With those two attributes and added to them a goal worth fighting for, something is bound to happen. The spark was kindled and for eight years we almost lived and breathed for the library. When we got together, our main topic of conversation was how to raise money for our project.

(Now, I will read the article from the Wellington paper about the first books collected for the library.)

BRILLIANT NEW YEARS RECEPTION BY MOST POPULAR LADIES OF THE CITY, JANUARY 1, 1900.

“The Prentis Study Club received yesterday in the home of Miss Edna Robbins for the benefit of the public library. The reception was a success in all ways. About two hundred books were received, and as many gentlemen were royally entertained. The gentlemen were asked to bring a book, instead of the usual “calling card”. As the gentlemen came into the house, they were

admitted by Master Quay Barnett and directed to the room which was used as a cloak room. Coming down the stairway into the reception room, a scene of rare beauty met their eyes. The house was darkened and gas lit. they were greeted at the door of the first reception room by Miss Robbins, the hostess, and Miss Ellie Smiley, President of the Club. They then passed to a table in front of a fast filling book case where they were met by two young ladies, who relieved them of their books, and requested them to write their names in the books they presented. After examining the books, each one of which was received by the young ladies with enthusiasm, the guests passed into the back parlor, where a frappe was served in front of the bay window. The window seat was piled high with cushions and invited the weary to pause and watch the gay scene. From the back parlor there were invited o the dining room where they were served a dainty repast of cold tongue buttered sandwiches, coffee and cake by the young ladies in charge. the room was decorated with carnations, the club flower and bows of turquoise blue ribbon, the club colors.

The club colors were pinned to the gentlemen's coats by Miss Laura Bixby, who was clothed in a turquoise blue gown to match. the passed from the dining room again to the cloak room to make room for the incoming guests. Instrumental or vocal music rendered by members of the club filled the rooms at all hours of the afternoon. A few personal friends of the club were entertained in the evening. (This was one of the scrap parties)."

The 200 books received on this New Years Day were the beginning of the Wellington Library. Harry Buttrey offered us the use of several shelves in

the back of his shoe store and the Prentis Library was born. Everyone took turns serving as librarian on Saturday afternoons and then Maude Barrett was elected librarian, a service she performed for two years.

In July 1905 the library was moved to the council chamber in the city building and continued to operate from there. All of the library fines and a portion of dues were set aside for the purchase of new books. In everything we attempted, we had the loyal support of the citizens of Wellington. The papers were willing to give us free publicity. Harry Woods was especially generous in this respect and he was continually praising the Prentis girls for their service to the town.

And so the years passed. We had watched our child from her infancy until she grew to be a healthy, normal youngster of eight years; but she had out-grown our ability to provide for her as good parents should. So we called for help. Through the Federation of Womens Clubs, we turned her over to the city. Mayor T.A. Hubbard accepted our gift in the name of Wellington, and he appointed a committee to organize a Wellington Library Association, which was called the Prentis Club Library, in honor of the Prentis Club. Our books and \$250.00 which was in our library fund was turned over to the City. The library functioned until the Carnegie Library was opened in 1916. Throughout the years, several members of the Prentis Club have served on the Library Board.

On March 1, 1900, Wellington bachelor's entertained us at the Arlington Hotel. From the MONITOR PRESS: BANQUETED THE PRENTIS GIRLS.

“A number of young bachelors, having been recipients of various courtesies at the hands of the Prentis Study Club, turned entertainer’s themselves and reciprocated some of the attention showed them, with a banquet at the Arlington Hotel, which ranks as one of the upper-crust functions of the season. The hosts, decided to test the proficiency of the guests in the knowledge of Shakespeare, which is one of the subjects studied by the club, introduced a series of questions in riddle form that required for they answers an appropriate quotation from the great dramatic works. Miss Effie Smiley, the Club President proved to have the greatest store of Shakespearian epigrams at ready command and was awarded the first prize. An interesting method of choosing supper partners was then introduced. Each of the gentlemen was represented by a little pasteboard figure hung on a string stretched across the room, and the ladies selected their partners by hitting his image with a small rubber ball. the ladies all managed to hit somebody, but not usually the one aimed at. The banquet was served in the large dining room and an elaborate menu was served. (Unquote)

On May 2, 1900, the County Jail was completed and the Prentis girls, by some forte of diplomacy obtained permission from the County Commissioners to open the building with a county fair, inviting all the citizens of the county to come and inspect their new building. the proceeds from the entertainment, you may readily guess, was to be used to finance the library. The evening was enjoyed by many people ^{from} ~~from~~ all over the county. It had been well advertised and we were rewarded by having \$300.00 proceeds. Ida Hoge and Ethel Showalter were business managers and Effie Smiley and Gertrude Caldwell

were finance committee. The rest of us served as barkers for different exhibits. We sold cake, candy popcorn, peanuts, red lemonade, ice cream and coffee. When our supply ran low and no more could be purchased, the problem was solved by the simple process of division and the sales went merrily on. Mulvaney, the street vendor, lent us his rag doll rack with rubber balls and a thriving business was carried on in one of the cells. there was a fake art exhibit in one cell and a menagerie of baby rabbits, chickens, pigeons and kittens in another. A late sleet came up before the show was over and we had to give our babies special care to keep them from chilling. We had a wheel of fortune, a fortune teller and a snake eating man -- Bosco the snake eater. One of our friends carried a hand organ on which was perched a monkey carrying a tin cup and collected pennies for the fund. Everyone had a good time, especially the Prentis girls. But after the crowd departed, consternation reigned. the money bags were missing. Everyone searched frantically, but to no avail. The next morning, the money was found in a table drawer where one of the girls had put it for safekeeping.

The fall of 1906, the members of the Wellington Lecture Club, requested the Parentis Club to take charge of the finances for that year, with the understanding that the club could keep for the library fund, everything above expenses. This was quite a responsibility, since it very frequently happened that expenses exceeded profits. We accepted, and that netted the library fund \$340.48, which was the largest sum added at any one time.

Please permit me to give a few statistics pertaining to our members.

Ethel Showalter, in addition to being the first President, was also the first bride, the first mother and first grandmother. Florence Lynch, being the first Prentis baby, was given a shower when she was about three months old.

The first bridal shower was given at the home of Mabel Piatt in honor of Mable Klein before her marriage to Charles Havens. From that time on, every bride was giving a shower. From that time on, for many years, each member gave the bride a sterling silver spoon with the donor's name engraved in the bowl. Ida Hoge was the only member to hold continuous membership throughout the years.

The custom of giving a dinner honoring the mothers of our members continued for years and on June 11, 1924, the mothers returned the courtesy by entertaining the members at a breakfast at the home of Mrs. S.W. Spitler.

During World War 1, in addition to our Red Cross work, the club adopted a French war baby, and helped with her support. We had several touching letters from her mother expressing appreciation for our help. (Quote) "during the situation in which we have found ourselves" (Unquote).

One of our members, Mildred Mulets Metcalf, made the supreme sacrifice for her country, having died as a result of her war duty. Two of our members, Olive Spitler Hitchcock and Lottie Wheeler McKee gave their lives that another life might begin.

We have had many fine teachers on our rolls. Others have made a success of the business world; still others have chosen home-making as their career. In 1934, Maude Renn Rothrock had the distinction of being chosen the Poet Laureate of the 5th District Federation of Clubs.

We have contributed gifts to hospital patients and veterans and sent money for the relief of the unfortunate. When St. Lukes Hospital was built, one room was furnished by the Prentis Study Club. When a member of the club passes away, a book is placed in the local library in her memory.

We read in our early records, "that the Prentis Club was organized for the literary achievement alone." I wonder if we have attained the heights to which we aspired in our youth. I seriously doubt it, but in viewing things from the viewpoint of a mature mind, I am sure that we have accomplished greater things than if we had devoted our time to the study of literatures alone.

The club has never turned a deaf ear to any worthy cause, whether it be a urgent need in our community, the call of our country in time of war, or the cry of a hungry child across the seas. When Mrs. Prentis pleaded the cause of service she must have made a deep impression upon the hearts of those 20 young girls, for in their small way, they have tried to follow the ideals which she upheld.

This history is as accurate an account as I can give with the records available. I promise that when we celebrate our 70th Anniversary in 1968, we

~~W. L. F.~~

have prepared this program will be perfectly content to sit in our rockers and listen to you kids recount the story of the Prentis Library. However, I will NOT promise that there will be no corrections or additions suggested by the Old Guard.

Berthe S. Van Voorhees

*Oct 30, 1924 - New
Mrs Noble Prentis - guest
of Prentis*

Mrs. W. L. Fossett read a history of the Wellington Library taken from a special story written by Mrs. VanVoorhees for the Wellington Daily News of November 16, 1934. After a visit by Mrs. Caroline Prentis, for whom the club was named, the members came interested in civic affairs and decided upon the establishment of a library as their special project. On New Year's Day of 1900 the club entertained with a reception at the home of Edna Robbins (Mrs. H. W. Herrick of Winfield), a charter member, and asked each guest to bring a book. Thus the library had its beginning and was called the Prentis Library until it was taken over by the city. The club held markets and bazaars to earn money to buy books. The members took turns keeping the library open on Saturday afternoon. Other interests of the club have been those suggested by the Federation of Women's clubs with which it has been affiliated for many years.

Through The Years
FIFTY YEARS AGO TODAY ^{W. L. F.} 5/8/56
Perry E. Miller enjoyed a visit this morning from his brother, S. F. Miller of Tonkawa. Together they left for Kansas City this afternoon, where they will attend the combined meeting of the Kansas and Missouri Associations of opticians.
Mrs. Maude Sanders Stewart and Mrs. Sim Nofsinger of St. Louis will be in town tomorrow for a short visit.
The Prentis girls made over \$50 at their market Saturday which they gave for the benefit of the public library.
W. M. Ferguson and Councilman Wyatt are in Oklahoma.
W. A. Renn left Sunday morning for Texas. On the same train was his son, Walter, who is just back from Boston.
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